

## **The Postcolonial Arctic**

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### **Introduction**

In 1996, the distinguished Princeton-Toronto historian, Natalie Zemon Davis, identified four approaches which resonate generally as key strategies in postcolonial analysis: 1) To analyse the European gaze to reveal dominant western attitudes towards non-European peoples; 2) To privilege ‘indigenous peoples and Europeans as both actors and reactants’ and ‘to construct accounts of their relations in terms of the polarities of hegemony and resistance’; 3) To focus on the middle ground, a hybrid or third space of exchange and mixing, and; 4) To follow the paths of material objects (e.g. indigenous maps, memory sticks [sic], or wumpum belts) through the material culture of the middle ground to reveal complex processes of autoethnography.<sup>1</sup>

While living amidst polarities and dialectics can be very productive, Zemon Davis also counsels us to move ‘beyond polarities’, the second strategy framed as encounters between alternative or incommensurable worlds. Although she warmly acknowledges the rich insights to be gained by comparing methods of Europeans with those of ‘Others’, she sees the limitations of treating multiple knowledge systems as though they simply emanate from singular epistemic communities without shaping each other across different spatial and temporal scales. Hence she directs us towards the middle ground of exchange in which complex identities, shaped by material forces near and far, are reformed in important and often unexpected ways.

The injunction to go beyond the ‘critical encounters’ paradigm that achieved theoretical prominence in the early 1990s around the work of Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes*, Tzvetan Todorov, and others, reflected on the historicity of the watershed events of 1992, coinciding as it did with divergent responses in Europe and the Americas towards the treatment of the quincentenary of Columbus’ expeditions to the New World. At the time, the social and political tensions and currents in the Americas reverberated through the human sciences. ‘500 years, yes, but of what?’ asked critics. What should be commemorated, how, and by whom? Fuelled by the African-American civil rights movement of the 1960s, the environmental movements born in the 1970s, and indigenous political governance organisations that emerged in the same period, waves of anger and outrage were reflected in many postcolonial literatures. Further afield, historical writing from the Asian subcontinent and different

regions within Africa contributed to a crisis for received historiography around the history of European expansion and the relationship between expert knowledge and global capital.

The collective challenge in the early 1990s was to reshape historical practice to ‘decentre’ the hegemony of western knowledge in the form of maritime navigation and landscape. While many American intellectuals were celebrating Fukuyama’s *The End of History*, basking in the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, then-early career environmental historians such as Mary Terrall, Richard Grove, Richard Drayton and myself were interrogating the figures of the surveyor, botanist, explorer, and colonial administrator. In his study of George Everest Matthew Edney cited Margaret Thatcher as Everest’s reason for leaving Britain, which was then in the grip of the worst recession since the Great Depression. This was the setting which gave the framework of ‘encounters’ an immense poignancy, when the need for decentring had a sense of intense urgency about it. It reflected a world that was deeply polarised. In this article, I ask what the resonances are of ‘decentring’ in how we understand the Arctic today.

### **Mapping pasts**

Somewhat recklessly, I embarked in 1988 on writing a doctoral thesis concerning the history of encounters— as told from both sides, as it were. I was inspired by the extraordinary oral traditions testifying to the technical navigation skills possessed by Inuit Elders in Northern Canada. These traditional methods of navigation were regularly practiced across the network of trails spanning thousands of kilometres of sea ice, and thus the challenge I set myself was to tell the story of Arctic exploration—its longitude and navigation— by traveling with Inuit to understand their perspectives, while also developing a serious engagement with the history of Britain’s maritime empire.

### **Figure 1. Iligliuk’s chart of the Arctic Seas**

Although the names of the Inuit champions of sea ice and longitude and *Ikiq* (large strait of water), may not be well known to many people outside the region, educating and encouraging audiences to imagine the geography of Canada’s Arctic archipelago going beyond the hegemonic mapping of the Northwest Passage has remained one of

my long term goals. To that end, in 2014 I launched with partners Claudio Aporta and Fraser Taylor at the Geomatics Research Centre at Carleton University in Canada a new online atlas of Inuit trails based on maps drawn by Inuit—revealing different kinds of autoethnography and power relations—to illustrate how trails connected between Inuit peoples from coast to coast, and to show how this impressive network of trails spanned the North American continent like an aboriginal songlines map for the top of North America.

## **Figure 2: The Pan-Inuit Trails Atlas.<sup>2</sup>**

This digital atlas (Figure 2) poses questions about its postcolonial sensibilities. In what senses are Inuit voices represented in this digital cartographic performance? The project continues to reflect to some extent the polarized values of states and citizens in the 1980s folded into open source technologies of the 2000s as supported by Google. New and old colonialisms, changing colonialisms, can be hard to distinguish.

Travelling with Inuit friends was my inspiration; in that culture which prizes tolerance and patience, I was sometimes identified with *Parrisee*, the person and occasionally Parry, the legacy. Being identified with the protagonist one studies is a thorny, if not uncommon, problem for historians. There were, however, many historiographical resources to draw on for investigating comparative modes of engagement. French historical anthropology was key here because the pioneer of Arctic sociology, Marcel Mauss, invented the theory of gift exchange. So, too, there were new and important tools for decentring longitude in the work of Bruno Latour/Louis Pasteur (Paris), Marshall Sahlins/James Cook (Chicago). In *being Parry*, I was in distinguished company.

I remember fondly the occasion in 1996 when I was introduced to Mario Aupilarjuk, a very distinguished Inuit elder from Rankin Inlet on the west coast of Hudson Bay. I was very excited because my Inuk friend, Bernadette Dean, herself a leader in pursuing issues of justice relating to youth, elders and gender, had been preparing me to meet someone very special. In the Inuit tradition, we visited Aupilarjuk for tea at his home. It was indeed an honour. He told me that he had been looking forward to meeting me and had a question, which we might try to repeat here as an imaginative thought experiment. Prefacing his question by observing that I had spent many years at famous universities (Edinburgh, Manchester, Cambridge), he

asked me simply and earnestly, ‘What is the most important thing you have learned there?’ The moment had a rare intensity that comes when someone’s attention is given in its entirety to you as its focus, the uncanny experience of being listened to.

A sense of calling, attentiveness, urgency and exchange are fundamental notions to consider in the analysis of a postcolonial Arctic. Questioning one’s personal and theoretical orientation has been recognised by many postcolonial scholars (e.g. Rosaldo, Clifford) as being critical to the enterprise because doing so involves a reappraisal of the shared ground on which we stand as knowing subjects. It could be argued that it is a necessary condition for a full engagement with the complex braiding of historical strands and experiences that is the material life of postcolonial methods. Postcolonial analysis is *work*, and usually difficult work.

Braiding is gendered in interesting ways. On the one hand it is a practice associated with weaving of hair more often by women (though also by men). On the other hand, it is integral to the way that ropes, or sheets as sailors call them, are formed and spliced. In each case, braiding creates strength, shape and texture out of discrete plies of yarn, which in turn are comprised of fibres. I want to suggest that braiding in the Inuit world is neither simply about being at home (domestic) or about life on the trail (hunting), and that this digital Inuit atlas displays a network of braided trails (c.f. Ingold 2013, Turnbull 2000). An example (Figure 3) from a mapping workshop will illustrate this.

### **Figure 3. Pond Inlet Elders mapping together**

During one of my journeys to the field, Annie Paingut Peterloosie (c.1940—2012) from Pond Inlet told me about the difficult days when as a teenager she was promised to a young man, but wanted to marry another. In fact things turned out as she had hoped, and she married the man she wanted. Because her husband’s father was a great hunter, Annie (Figure 4) travelled many thousands of kilometres of trails while she was still a young woman, and the journeys she remembered and drew were of course the shared experience of a family group.

She also remembered at age three, travelling in the winter down the coast from Igloolik to Repulse Bay (Aivilik). Her body carried and protected by her mother’s *amauti*, her head was raised up just enough for her eyes to scan the horizon. One is never too young (or too old) to look at and to learn of the landscape’s detailed

secrets. Her particular pleasure was seeing a herd of caribou for the first time, a memory so enduring and etched with feeling that she asked her family to take her back to that spot in her later years – which they did, much to her delight. Annie is remembered by many who knew her in Pond Inlet for her work as a teacher, a well of support and love for those in her midst. Her humility and orientation towards the needs of others was recognisable in the calmness and joy of her presence – in a way that had nothing to do with romanticism. It was something more to do with a sense of belonging tied up with movement and change, self-knowledge that doesn't stand still or eulogise the past. I understand she is greatly missed.

#### **Figure 4. Annie Paingut Peterloosie**

Now is a strange time for northern peoples and places – changing weather patterns and much more uncertainty besides. More and more books are being written about the Arctic's future – its new norths, new investments, new uncontrolled events – and a stream of other new imperatives, geopolitical discourses tinged with prophecy about what will be and could not be otherwise. This feels like the era of a new wave of experts who have come in a hurry and have a lot to say. When I sit in on international governance meetings, I sometimes remember the Avett Brothers song 'Ten Thousand Words' where they sing 'ain't it like most people are no different, we like to talk on things we don't know about'. This futurology, a form of political economy following the narrative of commodity-driven colonialism, represents an important but different understanding of historical braiding: a cacophony of voices linked to capital, finance and industry like the old trading floor of the Chicago stock exchange, now hollowed out and dominated by computer algorithms trading with each other. In the Arctic, where once there was historical memory, there is now a theatre of auctioneers, stock tickers, and complex financial instruments like credit default swaps and sub-prime investments carving out new voids. If the Arctic's political economy and political ecology have arguably acquired new complexity over the past decade, we should ask whether this is the result of maturing political settlements or the entrenchment of new polarities on top of old.

For example, Iceland's major banks went into receivership during the financial crisis of 2008 because their hedge funds got out of their depth in selling derivatives of complex financial products. Anthropologist Neils Einarsson has argued

that the extraordinary derivatives accumulation was only made possible because the country's future fish stock quotas were used as collateral for these enormous derivatives products.<sup>3</sup> With important exceptions in the urban centres of Alaska and northern Scandinavia – northern cities are becoming evermore important for the future of the circumpolar region – most northern regions have tiny tax bases and levels of debt that keep the bailiffs at bay only because of sustained state interventions. Yet nearly two decades ago, Harvard sociologist Colin Irwin diagnosed the structural inequalities that keep the majority of people inhabiting northern resource peripheries in a state of unequal life opportunities and health indicators.<sup>4</sup> This, he argued, was a fork in the road and for all that there had been significant devolution, welfare dependency was the road taken. This hasn't changed for the simple reason that the structural inequalities where the wealth and energy flow in southerly directions, suits states, corporations and shareholders very well.

Not everyone is poor of course; many people contribute to the service economy who are highly skilled, and some are highly educated. The Inupiat North slope borough of Alaska is said to be amongst the richest municipalities in the whole of the USA, as their stake in resource revenues has made them very wealthy. But this is in large part evidence of the growing disparity of wealth and power in resource peripheries. Not for nothing has the Arctic been dubbed the 'global South' in the North, as researchers look to Nigeria or South Africa for fertile comparisons. The Arctic is now very clearly part of the same world in which the richest eighty-five people have as much wealth as the poorest fifty percent (four and a half billion).<sup>5</sup>

### **Braiding narratives**

In order to be able to hear and listen to new braided narratives of hope in the Arctic, I think we need to employ postcolonial strategies that articulate responses to neo-colonial polarities while not forgetting the basic tools for understanding traditional colonialism. We need to allow northern voices, human and non-human, to be heard; but there is also an urgent need to have greater distance from the dominant discursive framings of the most powerful actors. It is no accident that governance forums in the UK are disciplined in Foucault's sense, and that postcolonial scholars are considered out of place. The UK's Arctic anthropologists are considered too awkward and are rarely invited to these discussions in spite of being the country's most experienced

authorities on Arctic political economy. There is no room for doubt that the Arctic is a seriously contested field where states are vying to redefine its hierarchies.

Strategies are needed that are much better grounded in historical understanding across a range of spatial, temporal and cultural registers; too much writing about the Arctic today is ahistorical and short-sighted while proclaiming a capacity for future vision. Strategies are needed—social economy *à la* Ash Amin or Frances Abele comes to mind as one such useful tack—to highlight the conditions in which public policy, particularly education, can succeed in building capacity in small rural communities and in the growing urban settings. Paolo Freire has argued that education is at the heart of building postcolonial consciousness, and that decolonising ourselves is close to the heart of what grounds postcolonial desire and enables it to be harnessed productively.<sup>6</sup> Linking our research to create collaborative educational resources from primary school level through university level should be prioritised as an opportunity where our work can have some of its greatest impact.

Postcolonial strategies need to be far more transnational in and beyond the Arctic, reaching out to the likes of Latin America, Australia, New Zealand, Southern Africa. This necessitates a certain distancing from political centres, risking unpopularity, for example, to come closer to the aims of liberation theology, which lie in seeking ‘solidarity with the poor’.<sup>7</sup> The Arctic as it exists discursively – a wonderfully rich, cooperative environment largely shared by developed nations working collaboratively with northern peoples – is fracturing under pressures that are both internal and external. The kind of postcolonial analytical strategies needed must be sufficiently grounded in northern settings but distanced from the present political constitution of elites in order to survive the current political transformation, to seek a situated sense of place and hope in the fractured and fragmenting high latitudes on which global Arctic visions are projected.

Perhaps one might contemplate the idea of a ‘post-Arctic’. One interpretation of this is an analytical space that distances itself from the excesses and residues of commodity cycles that have been part of the waves of northward capitalist expansion since the sixteenth century. To paraphrase Latour, if we have never been ‘Arctic’, then why should we be compelled to subscribe to Arctic modernism today with its clichéd and wrongheaded polarities of traditional/modern, local/global, nature/culture, human/animal.<sup>8</sup> We know that these dichotomies grossly distort the

fabric of our human and non-human ecologies. To understand how we might inhabit the post-Arctic, let us explore what assumptions and values it challenges.

To some extent, that is what the articles in this issue of *Moving Worlds* do, posing concise questions about both the Arctic's postcolonial past and its neo-colonial present. Taking a leaf out of other postcolonial studies, what we see in the Arctic today—including indigenous political devolution in its different forms such as Greenland's multi-party devolution—is not so much postcolonial as a set of strategies of containment on the part of Arctic states, playing out a set of historical processes of nation-building in which the aboriginal title of northern peoples continues to pose awkward and uncomfortable questions to the metropolitan majority. This particular group's economic dependence on primary resource economy is mediated by identities in which northern ecologies and the growing poor are largely rendered invisible, romanticised or 'other'—and accordingly displaced to the margins of national consciousness.

When I first trained as a project engineer some thirty-five years ago, I visited Arctic military camps, visited Inuit communities, discussed issues with highly educated government advisors (including now friends), and spent hundreds of hours in libraries and archives. Rarely can I remember occasions when power was devolved with commensurate resources; what is devolved is wrapped in the rhetoric of generosity and equality, and only acknowledges historic injustice and rights when required by courts of law. States have been opportunistic in devolving authority tied to conditions of debt —Greenland is no exception. What appears to be a paradox in fact displays remarkable consistency: that northern states during the peak or boom phases of commodity cycles are highly centralised and increasingly so; take contemporary Norway, for example. In this context, political devolution to northern constituencies involves a process of spatial and territorial practices whose aim is to enclose and regulate the commons for private capital. The record of devolution has all too often proved to entrench inequality, pouring cold water on aspirations for autonomy. Sharing common certain features with the international aid industry, this generates neocolonial dependence that sustains the new elites, a debate that takes James Ferguson's *Anti-Politics Machine* as its point of departure.<sup>9</sup>

Still, postcolonial opportunities may occupy what Homi Bhabha and others have called the interstices of these national spaces and state institutions – third spaces. Legions of researchers with master's or doctoral degrees (who tend to be



more or less liberal) are the labour force of government policy makers and consultants who create and maintain northern policies of this kind. Even my own institution, Cambridge University's Scott Polar Research Institute, whose original building was designed by Herbert Baker—architect to Lutyens and Cecil Rhodes—is no exception. Our institutions are difficult places to cultivate being post-Arctic. Many of our graduates are contracted to governments, research institutes or consultancies that regulate or mediate oil and gas development, mineral development, and environmental assessment. A good number of these graduates have written wonderful, insightful and inspiring dissertations about indigenous cultures, strategies of negotiation and resistance, resource co-management, and community-based governance. But the research economy is very closely tied to policies of resource development and is funded by states working closely with multinational corporations – variously benign and malevolent depending on the situation and one's perspective. Do young scholars think about the relationship between the kinds of livelihood that brought them into their field of research and the kinds of livelihood they will be seeking once they have finished? What future do they envisage once they become known as Arctic experts or polar scientists? We don't talk about this enough, and we should.

### **Big issues, big places: The Arctic, the global and comparative colonialism**

What does it mean to be involved in postcolonial Arctic studies when the foundations of its regional identity are starting to fracture under new constellations of globalisation? When according to the region's most distinguished political scientist, Oran Young, the region is experiencing an unprecedented 'state change'?<sup>10</sup> We must keep in mind this narrative of 'state change' – marked by climate change, the melting of sea ice, shifts in ecosystems, and globalisation marked by new political actors from eastern Asia. While the 'state change' claim has influence beyond its clear reference to the politics of global warming, it is very difficult to pin down what this claim actually entails, and how it speaks a mainstream liberal political ecology.

Part of the challenge for postcolonial researchers is to understand why we once imagined the Arctic to be fundamentally different from the rest of the world – how we were suckered by the appeal of Arctic exceptionalism. Northern politicians

and researchers alike have enjoyed a love affair with the narrative of circumpolar cooperation around environmental concern; *perestroika* and the melting of Cold War international relations; the creation of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (1991) and the intergovernmental Arctic Council (1996) with its inclusive role for Permanent Participants and its more cautious status for Permanent Observers.

In the mid-1990s, poststructuralist political theorists like Monica Tennberg in Finland were already drawing on the work of Foucault to examine Arctic governance in EU states in relation to Foucault's account of liberal governmentality. The Foucauldian critique is today more important than ever because of three related major trends that have been changing the Arctic: 1) securitisation; 2) the enclosure and shrinking of the commons; and 3) its commodification and digitisation (see Williams, this issue). Land, shelf and seabed are being relentlessly surveyed and measured, with an eye to assigning future exclusive rights of access or ownership. States, multinational corporations, and environmental organisations are all competing to enclose new territory at an unprecedented rate. Issuing leaseholds and title documents, streamlining environmental assessment, and corporate tax incentives on foreign investment are all examples of familiar instruments that, as John Agnew has argued, redistribute and outsource sovereignty whilst proclaiming to electorates that national sovereignties are being defended.<sup>11</sup> These instruments are necessary for multinational frontier capitalism to act in the backyard of G8 nations whose citizens seek reassurance that the nation's imagined territorial integrity remains intact. Seen in this light, the cycles of capitalist boom and bust fuelled by commodity prices strike me as more of a continuum than a state change.

In *Colonialism's Cultures* (1994), the historical anthropologist Nicholas Thomas set out a postcolonial programme for a comparative study of colonialism – or more precisely its cultures – exhorting colleagues to examine comparatively the entanglement of colonial cultures, taking coloniser and colonised, not as essentialist foundational categories, but as products of asymmetric power and exchange.<sup>12</sup> At a time when teaching postcolonial approaches to the history of science was scarcely in demand, Thomas' work was important as part of a postcolonial ferment: he brought together the work of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and the literary historian of travel literature and romanticism Nigel Leask. Similarly, postcolonial writing and criticism was much less present in the Arctic around the 1990s than in Pacific and Latin American studies.<sup>13</sup> Important and ground-breaking strands of postcolonial literary

criticism would look north: in Canada, Rudy Wiebe and Sherrill Grace would write against the grain of exploration narratives, deconstructing assumed truths about images of nordicity, frontier and masculinity, creating a new if controversial critical space for other narrative traditions. Meanwhile, in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, feminist and postcolonial scholars began their own interrogations of expansion and dispossession along the nation's cherished northern peripheries, currents of criticism which are very much alive today. Many of these scholarly works were grounded in their respective authors' personal experiences of the contradictions within northern national traditions, even as they drew inspiration from intellectual allies further afield. I had witnessed the racism and dislocation of settler-indigenous life myself in Canada's High Arctic in the 1980s, but discovered the postcolonial tools to open up the transregional contexts of colonialism and transculturation in the work of literary historians like Mary-Louise Pratt, anthropologists such as Inga Clendinnen and Marshal Sahlins, and indigenous leaders, though many were not necessarily aligned to, or even compatible with, postcolonial analysis.

In this context, we might wish to challenge one reading of the current Arctic paradigm shift as a new era in which the Arctic is engaging with the rest of the globe. Northern peoples, both indigenous and settler, have been making themselves knowledgeable about the world and engaging with it for a very long time. So this is not a story marked by a trajectory from a parochial north, or a region of wilderness, to a cosmopolitan global. The field of postcolonial literature has taught us to attend to the narrative strategies that produce cosmopolitan authorship and authority. And yet the recent publishing boom of books and articles on the globalisation of the Arctic, led largely by political and legal analysis, much less so by the humanities or social sciences, draws us back to an understanding of the history and legacy of nearly 500 years of Arctic colonialisms, an area of enquiry manifestly excluded from current mainstream political analysis of the Arctic, and absent from far too much of the academic analysis as well. This is particularly worrying when one considers that one of the main achievements of indigenous political international movements since the 1960s has been to acquire political representation, to demand universal suffrage and to resist coercion. As many Inuit have told me personally (I paraphrase): 'our parents didn't know that they could say no to the white man. It didn't occur to them. Our generation discovered that we could say no, that we have rights and can fight against injustice.' With states reasserting their authority over territory in the Arctic today, the

politicisation of indigenous consent constantly risks being coopted by the eight Arctic member states, as well as the EU. The new Asian observer states are not doing this—at least not yet. The political geography of Arctic orientalism is still unfolding.

Today, the importance of indigenous knowledge and self-determination are asserted in a range of settings that, only a few decades ago, were unimaginable dreams to all but a few visionaries. Land rights negotiations have transformed historic aboriginal title into a number of different structures of ownership recognised by national or western courts of law – and at quite a price in terms of title surrendered and the largely unequal, asymmetric terms of negotiation in these people-to-people negotiations. The importance of indigenous knowledge is written into the Arctic Council’s Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines, but when and how it counts is largely unspecified. Indigenous native corporations hold a wide range of assets invested in some cases close to home, and in others, in distant global markets.<sup>14</sup> The relationship between new forms of property rights and regulations means that in some parts of the Arctic, indigenous capital has been unshackled and can be more freely invested, but this in turn raises important questions about indigenous financial oversight and accountability – subjects that leaders and researchers have been shy to address. The many different models and provisions of self-government amongst, say, Evenki, Sami, Inuit, Gwitchin, Athapaskans, Inuvialuit and Yupik present a picture of great contrasts and enormous achievements, but with inequalities infused in this diversity. Arctic scholars still struggle to formulate an integrated picture of the political and cultural terrain of the region’s peoples because it is so varied. This is dangerous when the mobility of global capital is at its most volatile and potentially destructive.

### **Agency, shames and paralysis**

There is of course an elephant in the room, and that elephant is climate change. Its impact on Arctic ecosystems is profound and has been well documented by many researchers in the social and natural sciences through the *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment* (2004-5) and many other studies.<sup>15</sup> At a time when Arctic researchers face growing funding pressures, particularly where fieldwork is involved—notwithstanding Britain’s plans to build a new oceanographic polar research vessel—it is important to acknowledge the importance of this research, and the complex body of reliable evidence to which it contributes. Climate change is repeatedly demonstrated to be impacting on the ecosystems supporting both humans and non-

human communities. Sea ice melt is one of the most important phenomena of climate change, but it is part of a larger eco-political constellation of forces and interactions that is now loosely being labeled ‘the Anthropocene’..<sup>16</sup>

Postcolonial analysis of Arctic climate has probed climate change narratives to explore and reveal how the agency of northern peoples and environments is being marshaled to invoke different readings of a cosmopolitan regional citizenship, with important recent work on history of circumpolarity, indigenous citizenship and global climate citizenship.<sup>17</sup> There is much work still to be done to understand how different notions of citizenship are imagined, performed, and put to work. Beyond understanding social identity *per se*, postcolonial analysis, I would argue, is in a privileged position to explore the social and political implications of the Arctic being increasingly identified and appropriated as a set of resources. The very term ‘resource’ is bound up in competing understandings: energy security, common heritage of mankind, freedom of navigation, environmental activism. The tensions inherent in the values underlying these narrative frames represent a struggle by global-scale networks to redefine and arrange the boundaries of the Arctic itself into a new hierarchical spatial order. A range of powerful interests are currently seeking to establish conditions of regulatory stability and security so that their activities can be planned over time scales appropriate for recovering a medium to long term return on large-scale investments. Some northern constituencies are well served by being enrolled in global networks and have for some time been important actors in these networks. Consider, for example, the legislature and senators of Alaska; or the Arctic Council, which employs dialogue and research to help mediate between the interests of northern states, transnational indigenous groups and external actors.

If we follow the example of ANT (actor-network theory) from Latour and Callon, we can also begin to see how migrating Arctic fish stocks, seal populations, sea ice, contaminants and the aesthetics of landscape are also important actants or non-human actors in the reordering of Arctic spaces.<sup>18</sup> None of this is adequately described by the claim that the Arctic is undergoing a major ‘state change’. Again, it is scholarship from the humanities by Steve Shapin and Simon Schaffer that has reminded us that the term ‘state’ is value-laden. In the early years of the Royal Society, ‘state’ was as much a claim about how a particular social stratum of gentlemen could secure social order as it was an argument about why this specific group should be trusted to judge experiments about nature.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, I would argue

that the reworking of northern spaces today, in terms of, e.g. the negotiation of resource extraction leases, environmental assessment legislation, and political devolution and centralisation (simultaneously in Greenland), amounts to nothing less than new configurations of governmentality to continue the redefinition of relations of class, labour, exchange and indigeneity in the perpetual tension between homeland and frontier capitalism. This analysis is not merely academic in the pejorative sense of the term. Rather, it speaks to Alun Anderson's big question: When the ice is gone, commodity prices have fallen, and the corporations have gone, will northern states have ensured that their people have been true beneficiaries, or will the Arctic more closely resemble the abandoned sites marked by loss of biodiversity and contamination in so many other parts of the world?<sup>20</sup> Perhaps we are now entering an era in which a new social and spatial order might not only be described as a 'neo-colonial Arctic', but as the 'post-Arctic', a rhetoric of international solidarity that is torn away from the social and material ontologies on which the idea of a circumpolar Arctic has been predicated for the last two and a half decades. As postcolonial scholars, how do we get the measure of narratives of international cooperation that were once the hallmark of indigenous solidarity and connectedness whilst also being the telltale signs of what David Harvey and others have shown to be the flattening language of global capital operating at the margin? How do we find a critical distance from which to see how Edenic narratives and aesthetics about the Arctic are used to justify unprecedented securitisation and oversight that take so much and give so little back to the north? And how do we do this without diving head first into a twenty-first century orientalism that targets the foreign investment and shipping industries of eastern Asian states as the culprits for spoiling the planet's frozen Edenic heritage?

Still other questions emerge. Can we as a community of scholars construct a shared analysis of the Arctic that doesn't follow the pathways of capital in smoothing out all its differences, masking the historical contradictions and injustices that have been inherent in the different models of northern nation-building? In order to make wise choices in the Anthropocene, is it necessary that we close ranks to avoid difficult issues like our oil and mineral dependence, the offshoring of sovereign wealth funds, and double standards in labour conditions? I don't think so. Latour has argued that whereas, when we imagined ourselves as modern, we were overawed by nature, now that we understand the extraordinary power of the human collective over nature, we have moved from one form of paralysis to another.<sup>21</sup> This is closely linked

to the relationships between new and old colonialisms, between colonising others and decolonising ourselves.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this article, I have presented an account of the consequence of representing the Arctic today in terms of a 'state change'. Not long ago Arctic states exhibited such hubris towards their minorities that state officials found it difficult to envisage alternatives to their own governmentality, arguably because of their unwillingness to acknowledge historic injustices. Some of the worst excesses, such as sending indigenous children to residential schools, have been brought out into the open, whilst other outrages such as the thousands of aboriginal women in Canada who have 'disappeared' are only just surfacing. But citizens and their elected officials are easily paralysed by shame, leading them to seek what I would call 'narratives of consolation'. In that context, northern homelands are constantly being re-mythologised.

The power of postcolonial methodologies is that they offer real hope that we can begin to decolonise ourselves. The postcolonial dividend is that an investment in transnational conversations becomes a fundamental context for puncturing the myths of Arctic exceptionalism that thrive in the gardens of privileged nations where, in truth the introspective gaze tends to be highly disciplined and restrictive. Consider the long history of lost Edens in Scandinavia: Linnaeus transplanting and acclimatising plants to restore Sweden's lost Baltic empire; the romantic histories of Nordenskjöld and Nansen lifting the veils in search of Norden's deep past; the insistence of metropolitan citizens to subscribe to an essentialist notion of indigenous ethnicity through the lens of subsistence and lost freedoms rather than the complex pathways to urban and rural livelihoods, with and without reindeer; a 'right to narrative' that ordinary citizens who fancy themselves as cosmopolitan, never fail to reserve for themselves. Consider also exploring selves; interrogating one's own personal history; recognizing that as research scholars we are always in the process of becoming someone or something changed from what and where we have begun. These are not easy tasks. They are filled with uncertainties and offer no guarantees in return. But they do offer a shared social space in which we can learn from each other and change lives.

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